

## **For Your Information**

**July 6,2011| By: William Shaw and Nina Shea**

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On July 9, the world will witness the birth of a new nation and a triumph for religious freedom and related rights. The people of South Sudan chose independence in a January referendum mandated by a comprehensive peace agreement (CPA), of which the United States was the primary broker. Signed in 2005, the agreement ended Sudan's 22-year north/south civil war.

The war was triggered by the brutal attempts of the Khartoum regime in the north to impose its extremist version of Islam, leading the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), on which we serve, to deem it among the world's most egregious religious freedom abusers. Of the two million Sudanese dead, four million driven from their homes, and many forced into slavery, most were southern Christians and followers of traditional African religions, as well as hundreds of thousands of Nuba Muslims declared apostate and targeted in the same conflict by President Omar Hassan al-Bashir's regime.

Today, in South Sudan, religious freedom conditions have dramatically improved. The threat that sharia will be the binding law of the land has lifted. Southern churches are no longer bombed or shuttered. Muslim and Christian communities are at peace with each other.

Yet as we applaud South Sudan's freedom, we must not ignore the continued problem of Khartoum and the people it still abuses. While north and south have separated politically, their fates remain intertwined.

Bashir's recent military incursions into South Kordafan and Abyei, provinces on South Sudan's doorstep, are red flags, given Khartoum's history, from southern Sudan to western Darfur. Once again, Bashir's forces reportedly have bombed, pillaged, and murdered civilians, causing massive numbers to flee, while barring unhindered humanitarian access.

Throughout northern Sudan, severe human rights abuses, including religious freedom violations, continue, affecting Muslim and non-Muslim Sudanese. Khartoum enforces religiously-based morality codes, with violators often beaten. It denies the right of non-Muslims to public religious expression and persuasion and rarely permits churches to be built. While promoting conversion to Islam, it keeps conversion from Islam a capital crime and tortures suspect converts. Further, Bashir stated that after South Sudan became independent, he would make sharia law the basis of a new northern constitution, violating the CPA and dissolving its human rights institutions. Finally, Bashir's regime could strip southerners in the north of their citizenship and other rights.

Khartoum's course is tyrannical and dangerous. It risks instability on South Sudan's northern border, continued war and insecurity within its own borders, and a bleak future for religious freedom and related human rights. As a pivotal actor, the United States must remain engaged. Its involvement helped end the north/south war and the south's religious oppression. As a guarantor of the CPA, our government needs to take action.

What can the U.S. do?

First, it can sanction the Bashir regime for its egregious religious freedom violations.

Two sanctions are already in place. In 1997, President Clinton sanctioned the regime by employing the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA). And since designating Sudan as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) in 1999, deeming it a severe religious freedom violator, the State Department has required the U.S. to oppose Khartoum's receiving any loan or other funding from international financial institutions.

Recognizing its continued religious freedom violations, the United States should leverage these sanctions as Khartoum creates a new constitution and new institutions.

Most important, the U.S. should remain committed to bringing about a just and lasting peace for both north and south. To that end, it can further leverage its influence over Khartoum by considering the expansion of the scope of sanctions to include asset freezes and travel bans against Khartoum and its officials for threatening the peace, and encouraging allies to do likewise.

It should work with the CPA signatories to implement the peace agreement's remaining provisions in the still-war-torn Nuba mountains and in Abyei. It should urge that the constitution-drafting process in both the North and South be transparent and inclusive, incorporating international religious freedom standards and recognizing northern Sudan as a multi-religious, multiethnic, and multicultural nation.

Let the birth of South Sudan be the start of a journey toward freedom and peace for all Sudanese citizens.

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